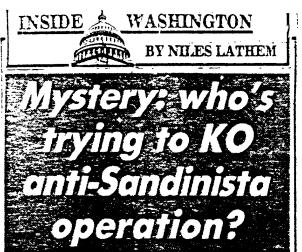
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ARE bureaucrats in the CIA trying to sabotage their own covert war against Nicaragua?

That is the question that astonished White House and Congressional officials are asking following a spate of reports that the operation is dramatically increasing in size and scope.

Officials who support the operation said recent leaks that the anti-Sandinista forces have grown to nearly 15,000 are "greatly exaggerated" and were "planted" in several news organizations at a critical stage of negotiations between the Administration and Congress over the program.

Officials on the National Security Council strongly suspect "liberals" in the CIA of planting the story to disrupt the negotiations and kill the operation.

They say several unnamed agency officials have opposed the operation from the beginning and feel it was thrust on the CIA by the State Dept. and Congress.

These officials are said to believe that a covert war against Nicaragua plays into worldwide perceptions that if the CIA is involved it's "dirty work." They therefore want any such war to be out in the open.

The House this week holds a rare and dramatic secret session on a move to cut off funding for the entire operation. Administration officials, led by CIA Director William Casey and Deputy National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane, were scrambling desperately to work out compromise language to keep the operation going.

When the Supreme Court ruled Congress' legislative veto over executive actions unconstitutional, it was believed that would strengthen the Administration's hand for a compromise to keep the Nicaragua operation going as long as the Sandinistas were supporting leftist guerrillas in El Salvador.

But following the leaked, or planted, reports of an increased U.S. role in Central America, compromise appeared to be unlikely—or, in the words of House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Clement Zablocki, "almost impossible."

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